DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 270 191 JC 860 332

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TITLE A Comprehensive Strategy to Examine and Address Transfer Education.
PUB DATE 16 Apr 86
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at a Conference of the Texas Coordinating Board (Austin, TX, April 16, 1986).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Access to Education; *Articulation (Education); *College School Cooperation; *College Transfer Students; Disadvantaged; High Schools; *Intercollegiate Cooperation; *Minority Groups; Postsecondary Education; School Holding Power; State Agencies; *Transfer Policy; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

This paper examines major transfer education issues and proposes a comprehensive strategy for examining and improving transfer education. The first section explores ten major issues: (1) access to higher education for minorities and low socioeconomic status (SES) whites continues to be a problem; (2) over 50% of all entering community college students have goals related to attaining a baccalaureate; (3) students who complete 2 years in a community college may be expected to perform reasonably well at a senior institution; (4) no one educational sector can solve the transfer problem alone; (5) occupational students, especially those in allied health, engineering technology, data processing, agriculture, and forestry programs, transfer in sizeable numbers; (6) faculty/student contact is one of the most important determinants of student retention; (7) giving students the right to fail simply has not worked; (8) literacy demands placed on community college students have decreased; (9) concerted efforts to address transfer education involving collaboration between two- and four-year colleges have achieved promising results; and (10) when community colleges fail to collect information and data, they lose out on a valuable opportunity to make modifications to improve their curricular and student support services. The next section describes a comprehensive transfer strategy, stressing that every constituency and educational sector must be involved in improving transfer education, and detailing the tasks to be undertaken by high schools, community colleges, senior institutions, and state agencies in a cooperative and collaborative effort to ensure that the nation's minority and low SES students enjoy full access to higher education. (RO)

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A Comprehensive Strategy to Examine and Address Transfer Education

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Presented at

Texas Coordinating Board Conference

Austin, Texas
April 16, 1986

JC 860 332

A Comprehensive Strategy to Examine and Address Transfer Education

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Improving transfer education for minorities and low socio-economic (SES) students is perhaps the number one academic-related problem presently confronting community colleges. This paper 1) examines major transfer education issues and 2) proposes a comprehensive strategy for examining and improving transfer education.

Transfer Education Issues

Any attempt to begin to address transfer education must consider complex, multi-dimensional issues surrounding the problem. The following represent 10 major issues which serve as the rationale for the development of a comprehensive strategy to examine and improve transfer education.

** The views expressed in this paper are solely the author's and do not necessarily reflect the views of OERI or the U.S. Department of Education.

1. Access to higher education for minorities and low SES whites continues to be a problem.

The literature on community colleges points to a leakage point in the educational pipeline which occurs during student transition from a two- to a four-year institution. Consider the following items:

- Although three-fourths of community college entrants indicate they intend to work toward a bachelor's degree, their chances of actually transferring to and completing the baccalaureate degree at a senior institution are slim (Astin, 1982).

- Of a total of 5,137 students who transferred from California community colleges to the University of California in 1982, only 3.8 percent were black and 8.3 percent were Chicano (MALDEF, 1983).

- In California, community colleges experiencing the largest transfer losses tended to be those with a very high proportion of black or Chicano freshman students (California State Postsecondary Education Commission, 1985; Hayward, 1985).

- According to the Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities (1982), one of the most important reasons that Chicanos, Puerto Ricans and American Indians are

under-represented in graduate programs is their greater than average attrition from undergraduate colleges, particularly community colleges.

- In a survey taken two years after 1980 seniors enrolled in college, 48 percent of the Blacks, 50 percent of the Hispanics and 48 percent of the low SES whites were not enrolled in college (Lee, 1985). These student types are predominant in community colleges.

- Data from the National Longitudinal Study (1977) indicate that of the students who entered college in the Fall of 1973, 47 percent of Hispanic two-year college students, compared to 28 percent of the Hispanic four-year college students had withdrawn from college by 1977 (Wilson & Melendez, 1982).

The message from facts and figures is clear. The majority of minority and low SES students are not enjoying full access in to higher education. They are not completing their programs of study in community colleges, and their success moving from lower - to upper-division programs of study leading to the baccalaureate has been only minimally successful.

The narrowing of full access to higher education comes at a significant time when the demographic complexion of the nation is changing. It is

expected that by the year 2000, Hispanics will become the nation's largest minority. Depending on net immigration, by 2020, between 25.4 and 28.7 percent of the population will be either black or Hispanic. In contrast, the percent of the non-Hispanic, white population will decline (Richardson & Bender, 1986; Lee, Rotermund & Bertschman, 1985). At the same time, poverty and ills associated with it such as school absenteeism, alcoholism and drug abuse appear to be increasing, particularly among Hispanics. In 1984 the number of Hispanic- origin children living below the government's official poverty line of $10,609 rose to 2.3 million, a full one percentage point higher than in 1983 (Rich, 1985). The disproportionate presence of blacks (43 percent enrollment) and Hispanics (56 percent enrollment) in two-year colleges gives credence to the notion that minorities and low SES students will continue to make their first contact with postsecondary education through community colleges (Rendon, 1984). More significantly, the impact of changing demographics is that community colleges will have to devise creative solutions to improve student retention, academic preparation and transfer rates to ensure that the nation's minority and poor students have a fair and equal chance to successfully complete their programs of study.

2. <u>Over 50 percent of all entering community college students have goals related to attaining a baccalaureate</u>.

Figures on baccalaureate degree intentions of community college students range from a low of 52 percent to a high of 74 percent (Richardson & Bender, 1986). However, it is estimated that only

5 to 25 percent percent actually achieve this initial goal (Richardson & Bender, 1986; Bensimon & Riley, 1984; Astin, 1982). Unfortunately, the opportunities and services provided to students who intend to transfer have declined. For example, the expanded mission of the colleges (from institutions providing a traditional college preparation to flexible people's colleges which prepare students to find a job and adopt to life) has resulted in a declined priority given to transfer education. Consequently, services for transfer students (e.g., orientation, counseling, financial aid and housing) have deteriorated (Kintzer & Wattenbarger, 1985). Another disturbing trend is that many community colleges are more inclined to emphasize remedial and vocational programs, jeopardizing the quanity and quality of transfer education.

Reflecting the fact that the initial intentions of community college minority students rarely translate to reality are figures which substantiate their gross underrepresentation in the share of college degrees earned:

- In 1980 blacks comprised approximately 11.7 percent of the U.S. population. However, they earned only 6.5 percent of the bachelor's degrees, 5.8 percent of the master's degrees, 3.9 percent of the doctorate degrees and 4.1 percent of the first professional degrees. A decrease of 18 percent was noted from 1975-1976 (Wilson & Melendez, 1985).

- In 1980 Hispanics comprised approximately six percent of the U.S. population. Yet, they earned only 2.3 percent of the bachelor's degrees, 2.2 percent of the master's degrees, 1.4 percent of the doctorate degrees, and 2.2 percent of the first professional degrees (Wilson & Melendez, 1985).

Thus, a contradictory situation exists where the majority of community college students initially intend to transfer, but ultimately only a small number of students actually achieve that goal. Perhaps counting completion rates at the end of four years is masking true achievement rates. Many minority students take five, six, seven or more years to finish their programs of study (Richardson & Bender, 1986). On the other hand, perhaps students who say they intend to transfer are actually not committed to that goal. Or it may be that their initial goal is unrealistic, that their goal to transfer is based on lack of information about what it takes to complete a four-year degree and a misconception about the structure of higher education (Bensimon and Riley, 1984). Some researchers and policy analysts suspect that students may be counseled away from transfer programs into vocational courses (Richardson & Bender, 1986). In any event, more research is needed to determine why so many students who initially plan to transfer never do.

3. Students who complete two years in a community college may be expected to perform reasonably well at a senior institution.

Although individual and institutional variances exist, the mass of evidence available indicates that two-year college transfer students, especially those who earn an associate before they transfer and who are well prepared academically, may be expected to recover from an initial "transfer shock" and achieve academic success at a senior institution (Richardson & Bender, 1986; Rendon, 1980; Martinko, 1978). Transfer shock is marked by a GPA decrease and a feeling of alienation experienced during the first term of upper division enrollment. Several factors may be attributed to transfer shock, including difficulties students experience readjusting to: 1) a larger, more impersonal environment than that found in most community colleges; 2) rigorous grading systems; 3) courses which cover content not taught before; 4) increased demands placed on study time; 5) lack of faculty/student interaction and 6) different procedures and policies related to calendar systems, enrollment policies and grading practices, among others (Richardson & Bender, 1986; Cohen, 1983; Rendon, 1984).

4. No one sector can solve the transfer problem alone.

Community colleges cannot solve the problems associated with transfer education by themselves. By the time transfer students enroll in community colleges, they are at the mid-point of their educational careers. In fact, community college students may

be considered "first-phase persistors" because they have survived a winnowing process which occurs during elementary and secondary school enrollment.

The problem of minority and low SES student underrepresentation in higher education really begins at the pre-college level. Blacks and Hispanics have lower high school graduation rates than whites. In 1982, only 51.8 percent of blacks and 40.3 percent of Hispanics graduated from high school. Exacerbating the problem is the fact that black and Hispanic high school graduates are less likely to attend college than whites. About 32 percent of white students attend college, compared to 29.9 percent for Hispanics and 27.8 percent for blacks. Poverty, unemployment, poor quality of education in inner city schools and lack of academic preparation in reading, writing and math are factors which may be attributed to high drop-out rates and low levels of college participation among Hispanics, blacks and low SES whites (Wilson & Melendez, 1985; Rendon, 1982).

The policies and practices employed by senior institutions and state agencies also eventually influence the success of transfer students. To solve the transfer problem, school districts, two-and four-year colleges and state agencies must work collaboratively to: 1) improve student academic preparation at the pre-college level; 2) revise attendance and grading policies; 3) develop student tracking systems; 4) re-train faculty and counselors; 5) establish articulation policies; 6) develop course equivalency policies

and 7) conduct data collection activities, among others (Roberts & Warren, 1985; Richardson, 1984; Rendon, 1984).

5. Occupational students transfer in sizeable numbers, especially those in allied health programs, engineering technologies, data processing, agriculture and forestry.

Occupational studies do not contradict transfer education. It may well be the case that more students transfer from occupational programs than from liberal arts curricular study plans (Cohen, 1984). It may also be that occupational students are better prepared to transfer than students majoring in traditional academic disciplines. The latter receive less guidance and are faced with fewer specific course requirements. Occupational programs are more structured, better funded, more selective and better organized in terms of course sequences than traditional liberal arts programs leading to the associate in arts degree (Cohen, 1984; Rendon, 1984). Fields such as nursing, dental hygiene and medical technology are highly selective and have long waiting lists, but fewer minorities are enrolled (Richardson, 1984; Olivas, 1979).

6. Faculty/student contact is one of the most important determinants of student retention.

The import of faculty contact with students in and outside the classroom cannot be overstated. Retention literature substantiates that student informal contact with faculty is particularly critical

to student persistence and is related to high grades, perceived intellectal growth and interpersonal self esteem (Rendon, 1982; Nora, 1985; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1979; Beal, 1979). Although counselors can and should play a significant role in student advisement, orientation and counseling, it is the degree of faculty contact with students that ultimately appears to make the difference between student persistence or attrition.

7. Giving students the right to fail simply has not worked.

Right to fail policies reflected in easy access and exit policies, lack of advisement and proper course placement, slack attendance policies and the absence of student assessment and high expectations have contributed to low retention and transfer rates (Study Group on The Conditions of Excellence in Higher Education, 1984; Cohen and Brawer, 1982; Tinto, 1975; Terenzini and Pascarella, 1978).

8. Literacy demands placed on community college students have decreased.

Research provides disturbing, although limited, evidence that literacy demands on community college students usually do no go beyond assigning and involving students in low-level cognitive tasks such as copying bits of information from blackboards and texts, writing brief, disjointed responses to narrow questions, reading to pass quick-score examines and writing a few pages (if any) in most courses (Richardson, 1983; Roueche and Comstock, 1981; Cohen, 1984).

This decline comes at a time when community colleges are absorbing larger numbers of non-traditional and ethnic minority students whose high school records and college placement tests demonstrate severe basic skills deficiencies. Unfortunately, in many community colleges, it is possible that these students can complete their courses with minimal or no involvement in high-level cognitive skill activities which require students to process, synthesize, analyze and apply information. According to studies conducted by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges, "students were required to write papers in one in four humanities classes, one in ten science classes; and under half the instructors in all of the liberal arts areas gave essay examinations" (Cohen and Brawer, 1982; p. 156).

9. Concerted efforts to address transfer education involving collaboration between two-and four-year colleges have achieved promising results.

To their credit, many community colleges across the nation have responded to the transfer problem. Where concerted, systematic articulation processes have been formalized, promising outcomes have been achieved. For example, in Phoenix, an articulation agreement exists between Arizona State University and the Maricopa Community College District. Committees comprised of members of both institutions meet program by program to design curricular and student information systems that enhance student flow from one institution to another.

The success of this agreement is evident in the fact the 40 percent of Arizona State University's junior class is comprised of transfers from the Maricopa District, (Cohen, 1984).

In Florida, 60 percent of the community enrollments are transfer students (Breyer, 1982). A number of mechanisms facilitate the student transfer process in Florida. These include: a common calendar, a common course numbering system, articulation agreements, a College Level Academic Skills Test, a common university/community college entry test, and a university/community college liaison program. At Miami-Dade Community College, students benefit from an Advisement Graduation Information System, and Academic Alert, a computer system informing students of their mid-term progress (Cohen, 1984).

10. <u>When community colleges fail to collect information and data, they lose out on a valuable opportunity to make modifications to improve their curricular and student support services</u>.

Much of the research conducted by community colleges is to help administrators make management decisions (number of classes to offer per semester, number of classrooms to assign, energy saving studies, etc). Little, if any institutional research is conducted to determine student retention, achievement and performance before and after transfer or graduation (Rendon, 1985). The lack of institutional research has contributed both to the misunderstanding of the problem and to the misdirection of solutions to solve the

problem. Presently, most community colleges don't know the gains students have made from entrance to graduation. They don't know how many students transfer to senior institutions. And, at best, they have only a vague idea about how well students are doing after they transfer or secure employment (Rendon, 1985). Although community colleges are not research institutions, they clearly cannot afford to design or revise their programs and strategies without some basic information about the success of their students and the effectiveness of their services. Without these kinds of data, the colleges will probably continue to develop ill-focused, ill-conceived programs which yield limited results.

A Comprehensive Strategy to Examine and Improve Transfer Education

Despite complex, multi-faceted issues which underlie the transfer problem, it is possible to develop a comprehensive strategy to examine and improve transfer education.

Who Needs to be Involved?

Every constituency with a vested interest in the academic success of minority and low SES transfer students must become involved in addressing transfer education. These include high school, community college and four-year college faculty, counselors and administrators as well as officials representing state agencies.

What Needs to be Done?

At minimum, the following tasks need to be conducted by each sector involved in transfer education:

1. High schools need to work collaboratively with community colleges to address the pre-college problems and needs of potential transfer students.

   An articulation agreement between feeder high schools and community colleges needs to focus on developing collaborative arrangements that address the following issues:

   - Coordination of course content and skills, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.

   - Improvement of overall academic preparation of students planning to go to college.

   - Advisement of pre-college students to ensure students make informed choices and take appropriate course sequences.

   - Early identification of potential transfer students.

2. Community colleges need to revise, reconstruct and reform their current policies and practices to facilitate student retention and transfer to senior institutions.

Examples of how community colleges can meet this objective include:

- Replace right to fail policies with right to succeed policies, i.e., mandate that students attend class regularly and maintain satisfactory progress; set high expectations; require minimum entry and exit competencies to exit from from courses; provide for diagnostic testing and place students in proper classes.

- Establish mechanisms to increase student/faculty contact in and outside of the classroom. Strategies such as faculty advisement and mentoring; field trips with faculty sponsors; internship situations and the clustering of students in block programs facilitate increased student contact with faculty.

- Set up Transfer Centers staffed by counselors whose responsibility is to assist students to apply for admission, financial aid and housing at senior institutions. Students should be helped with proper course selection and sequence, assisted to select an appropriate program of study, and counseled about adjusting to a university environment.

- Implement student assessment and feedback practices at the entry, during and exit college enrollment levels. A wide range of assessment procedures, including standardized tests, teacher made instruments, observations and interviews should

be employed to determine what content and skills students have learned and what achievement gains have been made over a period of time.

- Conduct research about transfer students. Community colleges should be able to provide data that closely approximates: how many students intend to transfer; where they intend to transfer; how many students earned two-year degrees and certificates; average student GPAs and how many students actually transfer to specific senior institutions. The data should be classified by ethnicity, gender, age and full- or part-time status. A yearly report with profiles of the institutions' transfer population should be published.

3. Senior institutions need to work collaboratively with community colleges to devise mechanisms that facilitate the process of transfer.

A formal articulation agreement between two- and four- year institutions may include collaborative endeavors such as:

- Coordination of course content and skills. It is essential that students be properly prepared to participate in four-year college-level courses. Also, students should not lose credits when transferring.

- Scholarships for community college transfer students.

- Orientation for transfers at four-year colleges.

- The exchange of information and data about transfer students. Four-year institutions should provide community colleges with data which reflects the number of students who transfer and the academic progress of students, especially the first year of senior college enrollment.

- Concurrent enrollment of students in two and four-year colleges.

- The development of course equivalency guides.

4. State agencies should become proactive participants in the improvement of transfer education.

The most important programmatic effort to improve transfer education which may be undertaken by state agencies is the development of a state wide student tracking system. Given stark variances in student college attendance and transfer patters, it will be impossible to create a perfect monitoring system. But some information and data based on best estimates is better than no information at all. Community colleges need to know how many students transfer, to what institutions they transfer, and how well students areprogressing after transfer. Without this vital information, community colleges will continue to make curricular and programmatic improvements based on trial and error judgements which yield inconsistent and uneven outcomes.

Conclusion

Transfer education is currently a volatile issue in the nation's community colleges. Although the transfer problem is difficult to examine and address, it is solvable. The solution lies in a comprehensive strategy to attack the problem at three stages: the pre-college level, during community college enrollment and the senior institution enrollment level. It also involves the proactive participation of state agencies which can be most helpful by coordinating data collection activities which monitor student flow from institution to institution. In short, the resolution of the transfer problem is within the purview of high schools, community colleges, senior institutions and state agencies working cooperatively and collaboratively to ensure that the nation's minority and low SES students finally enjoy full access to higher education.

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